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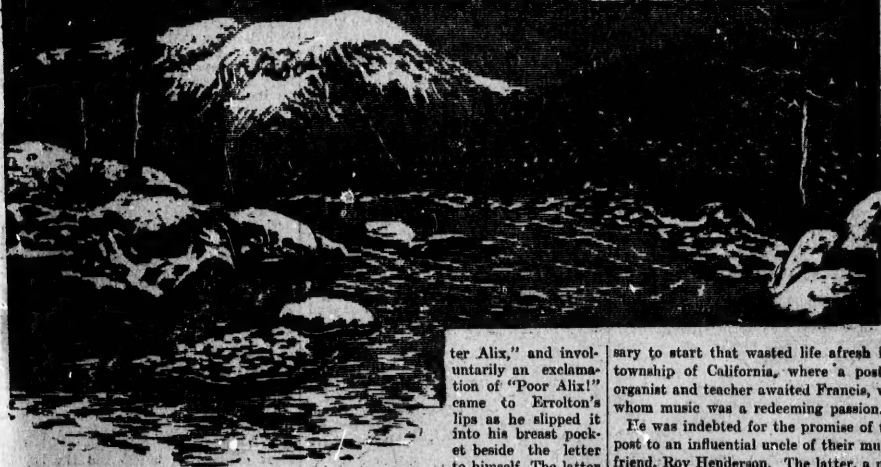
DEVOTED TO NARRATIVE, ROMANCE, INSTRUCTION AND ENTERTAINMENT

Vol., XVI, No. 21.

WILLIAMSPORT, PA., MAY 1, 1898.

STORY COMPANION No. 173.

THE NIGHTINGALE OF KLONDYKE



ter Alix," and involuntarily an exclamation of "Poor Alix!" came to Errolton's lips as he slipped it into his breast pocket beside the letter to himself. The latter

was in rounder, bolder caligraph, which bore the signature of Roy Henderson.

He walked to the fireplace and stood with his elbow resting on the mantleboard, looking down upon the cabinet photograph of a girlish head, with an aureole of light, fluffy hair.

Alix Rugen was Alix Cameron now; but as Errolton gazed tenderly upon this portrait of his love, as he had known her in the old days before she became his bride three short months ago, his mind was dwelling more on her brother, Francis.

Francis Rugen's was the old, old story of the prodigal son. In his early student days in Germany he had wasted his substance in riotous living. When his father's death left him and his young sister, Alix, in poverty he had, alas! swelled the ranks of that multitude of whom Kipling wrote: We have done with hope and honor; we are lost to love and truth.

We are dropping down the ladder, rung by rung. It was Ian Cameron who reawakened hope in that hungry heart, who implanted faith in that barren soul. He who had furnished the several hundred pounds neces-

sary to start that wasted life afresh in a township of California, where a post as organist and teacher awaited Francis, with whom music was a redeeming passion.

He was indebted for the promise of that post to an influential uncle of their mutual friend, Roy Henderson. The latter, a medical student, having some months' holiday at his disposal, had volunteered to accompany Francis to North America, and to see him settled in his new home.

There was the sound of a carriage stopping in the square below. He stepped quickly to the window. Yes! it was Alix, returning from her afternoon drive.

In another moment his young wife entered the room.

He came forward and kissed her, German fashion, on both cheeks.

"You have only just returned," she said, noting the uniform; "but, oh! you look tired."

She spoke still with the pretty Dresden accent, grown so dear to his ears, and her soft voice was full of concern as she saw that unusual grew shadow of care upon his face.

He unfastened her sealakin cloak, looking down into her uplifted, sympathetic eyes. How could he break to her the sorry tale he had to tell.

"I am rather fagged," he acknowledged "but it's not that, dear. I've had a letter from Roy Henderson."

"Oh, Ian! what is it?" she asked.

LEUTENANT

Ian Cameron, of the gallant "Black Watch," the Laird of Errolton, looked up from the closely-written letter he had been perusing

with a short sigh. His Glengarry bonnet he had tossed on the writing-table when he took up the bulky American letter which had arrived by that afternoon's post, and which he had found awaiting him at his private quarters.

Now, as he leant back in his chair, meditatively returning the sheet to its envelope, the bright Spring sunshine showed a little furrow of care and perplexity upon his broad, lofty brow. His eyes fell on a small missive in his lap, which had been an enclosure in the other. He lifted it and sighed again.

It was addressed by a man's hand, in sprawling German characters, to "My Sie-

breathlessly. "Francis is not ill?" The ring of anxiety in her words went to Errolton's heart, for he knew it was her brother's relapse to bygone dissipation that she really feared.

"He's all right," he hastened to reassure her. "Here's a letter from him for you. But I fear he is going to disappoint us, dear. Roy's news is a bit of a shock. Francis has chucked the appointment, and is starting off as a digger to some new gold-fields in Alaska, in British Columbia, called Klondyke."

"I should not have so much fear if we could count on his health and perseverance," said Errolton, intuitively reading her thoughts. "I had such hopes of his throwing heart and soul into this music business, and now this comes! As Roy says, it might turn out all right if only he did not lack concentration."

"What does Roy say?" she asked faintly. "You must mind if Roy is a bit blunt," said her husband, putting Roy's open letter into her hand, a trifle reluctantly. She looked at it for an instant, the close lines dancing unintelligibly before her tear-dimmed eyes.

"Read it, please," she said, very low. And with his arm around her, Errolton read it.

It was dated from San Francisco, and began, in Roy's racy style, with an account of the voyage across the Atlantic and the ultimate arrival of Francis and himself at his uncle's house, from which he wrote.

"And now, my dear Cameron, a most unlooked-for thing has happened, and I hardly know how to set about putting down the plain facts. We have had the fortune, or misfortune, whichever you like to call it, of falling in with an old cove who is another paternal uncle of mine, but whom I never set eyes on before.

"It seems he's always been counted a bit of a black sheep—married an American girl, run through her fortune, and when she died finally betook himself to regions unknown, and gave his relations no further trouble.

"This Spring he turns up at 'Friscio with no end of a yarn about the millions of gold in Alaska waiting for the picking. Every man you meet has got the Alaskan fever more or less acutely.

"Poor Francis took it badly the first set off, and finally Uncle Mac turned his head by an offer to sell him a share in his claim for a mere song, if Francis would throw in his lot with the mine and go back to Klondyke with him to work it.

"Between ourselves, I think it was a bit of bravado on Uncle Mac's part to lord it over my Uncle Dick, who thought he was doing no end of a good thing in getting Francis shoved into that organist post simply on your humble servant's recommendation. I tried hard to argue Francis out of it; but it's no go. He is under the delusion he'll probably prosper and strike a claim on his own account, make his fortune in a month, and live in the lap of luxury ever after. You should just hear Uncle Mac and him when they get together!

"In this new El Dorado, I am told, the private adventurer can do everything—find the gold, work it, bring it away. There is no drawback, no difficulty, no danger—oh, nothing to speak of whatever! But the way to get there is the face! Arctic horses cannot go further than the foot of the pass.

"The journey takes about three months, and, even Uncle Mac admits, the life involves incessant toil. Packing over pathless mountains, towing a heavy boat against a five or eight-mile current, sleeping how and where one can, shooting spiders, fighting gnats and mosquitoes by the million.

"Then digging in the bottomless frost, enduring eight long months of cold, which never rises above zero up there, and is often eighty degrees below; with the con-

tinual darkness of night, rarely any lighter than twilight, to outbalance the three short months of perpetual day from June to September.

"According to the proverbial understanding that when the North Pole is discovered a Scotchman will be found squatting on the top of it, I've made up my mind to sustain our national character of enterprise by making tracks with him, my uncle having offered to finance me if I will come along.

"As you delivered Francis into my charge, I feel in duty bound to see him through a doubtful business; and though it's not exactly the career I mapped out for the next year or two, I dare say a medicine will come in pretty handy in these forlorn desert quarters, and who knows I may come back to Bonnie Scotland a Count of Monte Cristo myself?

"Break the news gently to your wife, and ask her to trust me to look after her brother as if he were my own.

"I have not yet told you another extraordinary bit of news. Uncle Mac's only child, a girl of twenty or so, is going to Yukon with us. She has been all her life at a school in 'Friscio—been trained for a singer, and made a great sensation when she came out at one of the big music halls last year.

"A venturesome company is starting an opera-house at the rising Dawson City, on the Klondyke river, and she is engaged as prima-donna. She is as fine a lassie as you could meet all the world over, not at all contaminated by connection with the stage, as we straitlaced Scots are inclined to expect.

"I pity her, and don't think she realizes the peril of the tour; but she is as enthusiastic as any of us to explore the new country, and the old man is delighted at the arrangement. Women are rare in Alaska, so it'll be the blessing of the lot of us to have her near; but I hate the idea of her roughing it as much as I dread it for Francis.

"I'll write you when we get to Skaguay, the first real stage on our way to this land of Ophir."

Errolton read the letter word for word without comment, and Alix listened in breathless silence. When he had finished, the tears were streaming down her pale, beautiful face.

"Oh, Ian!" was what she cried then, "this is as I dreaded always—my brother may disgrace you. You should never have married me!"

He lifted her dear face up against his shoulder, and looked down into it with grace, reproving eyes.

"Alix, my little woman, don't say that! Whatever happens nothing can ever come between us two."

"It is because I love you so I would not bring you shame," she murmured.

"And is your love so selfish it would not let me share your trouble, be what it may?" he rallied her. "No, no, Alix! I own I am upset by the turn of affairs; but Roy is a splendid fellow. We could not have put Francis into better hands. And to think of a prima-donna going with them to those outlandish regions! By Roy's enthusiastic description of her, it sounds like the beginning of a romance, my dear, and we'll be hearing of a wedding one of these fine days when they have all become millionaires."

CHAPTER II.

Roy Henderson had been attracted by his fair American cousin, the rising young opera-singer.

To tell the truth, the stoic Scotch student, for the first time in his life, had allowed his heart to be literally stormed by the fire of Gowan Henderson's dark eyes, when he had listened to her invitation

from behind the footlights, "Oh, whistle, an' I'll come to ye, my lad."

Despite what he had said in his letter to Errolton, the strength of this sudden, secret love was already beginning to make him look upon her profession with all the distrust born of a good, old-fashioned upbringing in his stern mother-country.

Much as he might ordinarily enjoy the drama or opera, when his personal interest in actor or singer was aroused it was another matter. He saw the stage in its worst light, with its lurid beguillings which spells moral death to the many.

This was all a new and disquieting experience to the medical student, hitherto devoted entirely to the cramming of weighty knowledge and the passing of exams.

He would scarcely have owned it, even to himself; yet, over and above his anxiety for the welfare of Francis Rugen, it had been the prospect of Gowan going forth to an untired future in that distant land of gold which had finally decided him to cast in his lot with the gold-seekers.

Perhaps an all-wise Providence had thrown them together thus, to set him this task of protecting a fair, unsullied life, as yet so guileless of the world's evil.

Such, at least, was the belief which dominated Roy's strong, true nature, aided, doubtless, by that mystic enthusiasm the dream of first love.

But perhaps it was only when the little steamer bearing his party was throbbing on its course along the lovely waterway from Juneau towards Skaguay Bay, that Roy realized in truth the enormity of the hazardous expedition on which they had embarked.

For the hardened pioneer, Uncle Mac, he felt no misgiving; but Francis and himself—how would they weather the storm of coming events?

There had been little time for reflection in the bustle and excitement of getting together their mining outfit and food supplies. Then there was Roy's medicine-chest. It was no meagre task, to meet the exigencies of the long Arctic months in the far Northwest, where they would be entirely dependent upon their own resources.

As yet the Klondyke was a new country, almost shut off from trade and intercourse with the outer world, and each well-to-do emigrant had his tons of freight stowed safely in the hold.

As Roy looked round on the cosmopolitan crowd on board, lounging on the great bales of hay, chatting to the accompaniment of neighing horses and the bay of sledge-dogs, his heart sank.

His eyes fell on the figures of Francis and Gowan standing by the taffrail engaged in earnest conversation.

Francis Rugen's once thin and mallow cheek was rounded and bronzed, his black eyes were glowing with animation as he emphasized by a foreign gesture some point in his discourse. His companion was listening with evident interest, and replying now and then, with a brilliant smile flashing over her fair face.

That girlish form, enveloped in its neat fur coat and Tam-o'-Shanter bonnet, seemed sadly out of place among the heterogeneous garbed men who surrounded it, some already attired in the rough corduroys and heavy boots of the miner. Her features were more Scotch than American, her complexion clear, and glowing with the rich color and brilliancy of perfect health.

Roy was startled out of his abstraction by Uncle Mac's cheery voice at his elbow.

"They two mak' a bonnie pair, eh?"

Despite his long exile from his native Lowlands, the genial old miner still retained a strong Scottish accent, and prided himself somewhat in keeping up the dialect of his own particular birthplace. This was a cause of irritation of the more refined and successful brother in San

Francisco, to whom the scapegrace's vagaries and eccentricities had ever been a source of complaint.

It was one of the subtle differences between them which almost belied Uncle Mac's kinship with the dainty creature he owned as daughter; but by this time Roy was well used to his patron's homely peculiarities, and loved him none the less on that account.

Yet a decided flush of annoyance mantled his boyish cheek at the moment, for Uncle Mac had given voice to an impression which would have been the very last to assail himself.

True, yonder well-groomed German had little in common with the broken-down, dissipated Francis Rugen of older days whom Roy remembered; but his recollection was too vivid, the reformation of Francis too untidy, for Roy to contemplate with calmness the vaguest possibility of his controlling the future of Gowan.

Roy knew now that he himself loved her better than all the world. He almost turned impetuously to give expression to his thoughts, when a nobler impulse stayed him.

He had in a measure sacrificed his own career to further the good of Francis, and was his generosity to fall him now at the crucial test? No. If Francis could prove himself worthy of her, though his own heart broke, Roy knew he would be the last to stand in the way.

"You have taken a wonderful fancy for Francis, Uncle Mac," was what he said aloud.

"Ay, I'm aye on the side o' them wha's back's been tae the wa'," responded old Henderson, with the laconic sympathy of one who spoke from experience.

Roy said nothing. Francis Rugen's back had indeed been to the wall; and though that catastrophe was of his own making, Roy's work was to see it should never be so again.

He strolled further aft to where Francis and Gowan stood bidding each other good night. The grey of twilight was deepening, and the little tent city of Juneau, at the foot of its mighty snow-clad mountain, was fading from view; while above the plough of the engine will came the dying echo of the cheers that had speeded the ship's departure.

"I'm going to turn in," Francis greeted Roy on his approach. "I'm dead-beat."

He indeed looked somewhat worn with the work and excitement of the past few days, and involuntarily Roy thought of the greater strain of the journey yet to come. The next moment Francis had departed to his berth. He was standing alone by Gowan's side, and thinking of her only.

Presently she acknowledged his presence by a glance.

"If one could forget this," she spoke, with a shrug of her shoulders expressive of her surroundings, "it would be just lovely!"

They were steaming up a mighty gorge, deep and dolorous. All was silence save for the pulsing of the ship, and now and then the splash of a salmon breaking the water's glassy surface. Far away, the snow-peaks and black forests of Prince of Wales' Island rose, an unbroken chain, across the grey Pacific; and to the right snow and clouds lit up the bleak steeps, touched by the fiery blaze of the still unvanquished sun.

This was Alaska at last! But Roy for once was blind to Nature's beauty. His eyes were on the grimy vessel and on Gowan.

"You ought never to have come!" he cried impetuously.

She looked at him, her brown eyes full of that little air of scorn with which she had somehow come to treat her stole kinsman.

"And you," she said, "why did you come?"

Roy felt himself flushing like a school-boy. He dared not tell him it was partly upon her account he was there.

"To make my fortune, of course!" was what he answered lightly.

"Well, so have I!" she responded in a similar tone.

Roy leant his arms upon the taffrail, and looking away from her towards the white mountains, with a dogged expression upon his smooth face.

"It's had enough of this. It's not fit for a woman to rough it." He spoke a trifle brusquely.

"Once we are over the pass it will be all smooth sailing for me," she laughed. And her white teeth gleamed like pearls between her carmine lips. "I guess I'm not going to dig for what gold I can get!"

"You are going to do much worse!" The hot reply broke from Roy before he was aware what he was saying.

Gowan lifted her beautifully arched eyebrows.

"To sing to the tune of nine hundred dollars a week? Really, you are not very complimentary, Mr. Henderson!"

Roy bit his lips, annoyed at his own bluntness, yet by no means reconciled to that roseate future she depicted.

"I don't see how it'll pay the company who are running this venture to have a singer of your standard up in a mush-room place like Dawson City!" he rejoined. And his grudging tone detracted from the covert compliment.

"Well, as I haven't seen Dawson City yet, I reckon I'm going to wait till I do to abuse it. I'm quite satisfied the company you think so little of will pay me right enough, for I've got a signed con-

over her shoulder, with pretty petunias. "I guess I'm glad dad's not like you!"

Roy let her go in silence, his eyes fixed immovably on the sword of silver the tired sun was sending through the fiery clouds to the West.

His heart was hot, his spirits strangely downcast; and as he gazed on the wondrous grandeur of the scene, involuntarily a mute "God help us all!" came to his lips.

But he little knew how great was the need for that prayer!

CHAPTER III.

The slow trip of the Lynn Canal was over at last, and the real excitement of the journey had in truth begun, when the little steamer dropped anchor in Singum Bay, to be soon surrounded by a fleet of row-boats and Siwash canoes, eager to pick up passengers.

It was not till three days later her freight got transferred into the large scows. Then it was towed in by row-boats to the low beach, en route for the Dyea trail.

As a recognized pioneer, old Henderson was followed by one and all, seeking the advice of his experience of the route. And the genial Scot, despite his "closeness" as to the exact whereabouts of his claim, freely imparted invaluable hints to the various emigrants bound to the land of gold.

It was Gowan who had felt all these necessary preparation irksome, and fretted with girlish impatience at the delay. It seemed to come naturally that she should claim Francis as her escort whilst she wiled away the time.

They explored the quaint settlement, bargaining with the squaws for moccasins, mackinaw jackets, and Indian blankets, which she impressed upon Francis would prove treasures to their small community when they arrived at their claim.

Francis, who had felt himself of little account in the business transactions for packing over the trail, was quite willing to vow his appreciation of any purchase Gowan decreed, so long as the choosing of the same should keep her by him side.

When they had exhausted this diversion, he was all too ready to follow her in excursions along the lovely valley, through groves of cottonwood and spruce and birch, or by the thickets of alder and willow by the river banks.

They conversed in German, by Gowan's request; while she, in turn, taught her companion divers idioms of her native tongue.

The time was fully occupied by the several prospective miners. They had to arrange for the somewhat difficult landing of their goods, and to secure the services of the Chiloot Indians as guides and helpers in the arduous task of packing their transports over the great pass.

Once, as she sat by the swift river, watching Francis playing his line for salmon, the low chirp of sparrows, breaking the great silence, proved an irresistible incentive, for Gowan, too, to burst forth in sudden thrilling song. Her notes sounded even a thousand times sweeter and purer under that great vault of heaven than in the city music-hall, where Francis had first heard her wondrous voice.

Involuntarily the angler abandoned his vocation to turn to listen to it now. And then it was Gowan who stopped short in artless confusion.

"Say, do you mind?" she queried. "I forgot all about the fish. There, I'll be as quiet as a mouse."

The impetuous reply of Francis was in some words of the old German love-song of the "Lorelei," which brought a pretty blush to Gowan's fair cheek, and roused the speaker himself to a subtle sense of the sweetness of her charms.

"Ah! were you ever in love?" was Gowan's next naive interrogation, uttered in



"If one could forget this, it would be just lovely!" tract from Count Hubert, who's financing it. I'm beginning to think it's a pity I didn't go by St. Michael's with him and the rest of the troupe, since you think it'll be such an infliction for dad and you to have me along."

She turned from him in evident pique; but Roy put out his hand impetuously and stayed her, with a sudden flush in his frank face.

"You know, or you ought to know, I am only too proud you are coming with us," he said, in some hasty confusion. "It's— it's because I hate to think of you singing to every Tom, Dick and Harry."

Gowan moved away, far from mollified. "How real Scotch you are in your old-world notions!" She threw the words

childish recklessness, as she prepared to lead the way into the township. And then, with a swift remembrance of his fiery past which flashed back upon him, Francis awoke to the midsummer madness of this love-dream into which he had unconsciously been drifting.

But was it only midsummer madness? For as he made answer to Gowan in a low affirmative their eyes met, and something in Gowan's glance made Francis Rugen's heart beat faster.

"Say, did she jilt you?" spoke Gowan, in such tones of soft sympathy that they robbed the question of its brusqueness.

And somehow Francis found himself pouring out the whole story of his past in her ear—his love for Count von Nickish's fair daughter, their brief betrothal, her desertion of his reverse of fortune, and his own reckless undoing.

"If I ever met that girl I should hate her!" cried Gowan.

"It was not all her fault," said Francis quickly, though his pale cheek flushed at the warmth of her partisanship.

"I've learnt to see things in a different light now, and the count was quite right to say I wasn't fit to come near her; but it was her own brother brought me to ruin in the beginning."

"Then I should hate him, too!" exclaimed Gowan. "If I were you I would just love to be revenged upon him some day."

Francis caught her little sealskin-gloved hand nearest to him.

"Don't say that!" he said, with a look upon his mobile face that made it for the moment stronger and nobler.

"I've come to believe in a higher Ruler of our destiny and justice and retribution. The fellow to whom I owe everything in life taught me that. I mean my sister's husband, Captain Cameron. He and Roy Henderson were the saving of me. Those two have done more for me than I can ever repay."

A little curve that was half of amusement and half of scorn flickered on Gowan's fine lips.

"I did not know my Cousin Roy posed as a philanthropist," said she, for it was wonderful how the mere mention of Roy's name was capable of rousing her irritation.

Was it because Roy had so far proved apparently adamant to her beguiling, and even ventured to disapprove of her fascination of the stage?

"Don't copy Roy too much. You will be too big a saint to care a morsel about poor me!" she broke off, with quaint pathos.

"Care about you?" he repeated impetuously, lifting her fingers to his lips. "If ever I believed in angels on earth, you are one, for you have given me back my faith in all women!"

And then Gowan, with pretty shyness, effected a change of conversation, with a deprecatory little laugh. Nevertheless, the flattery was dear to her coquettish heart; for, in truth, it was such that she had been striving to win.

When they got back to Dyen, Roy met them on his way to its one most important building—namely, the store and post office.

The start for the trail was all but complete, and Roy was about to fulfil his promise to Ian Cameron by sending off a message to go with the steamer by which they had come on her return journey south; for it was the last news of their welfare it might be in his power to transmit for many a month to come.

Roy eagerly hailed Francis, whom he knew intended enclosing a letter also. So Gowan passed on alone to their encampment on the river bank, westward of the so-called village composed of dirty tents and little wooden cabins, crowded close together.

On such trivial incidents do circumstances hang!

For Gowan little knew that had she not parted with Francis then the current of both their lives might have been changed forever.

She stood for some time watching with amusement and curiosity the gesticulations of a small group of gaily-attired Indians outside a cabin, whose signboard read, "Chief of the Chilkoots," it being the abode of the Indian who controlled most of the packing arrangements.

Presently her attention was riveted by a tall figure in their midst, whom she recognized instantly, despite the unfamiliar conical dress he wore.

The next moment the stranger, too, had caught sight of Gowan's fair form, and the Indians fell apart as he strode out to meet her.

"Count Hubert!" Gowan exclaimed, all the surprise she felt concentrated in her voice.

"You see, I have followed my star," he said, possessing himself of her hand, and looking at her with eyes which spoke unutterable things.

"I thought you were going to St. Michael's," remarked Gowan, already recovering her composure. "Where have you sprung from, pray?"

"From the deck of the 'Era,' just landed five hours since at Skaguay," he rejoined laughing. "The temptation to accompany you overcame me at Juneau, my fair Gowan. I pictured you perhaps stranded in the snow-pass, so I braved death and perils to be at hand to look after my property."

"Do you consider my voice dear at nine hundred a week?" pouted Gowan, who had learnt to the full exactly how best to play upon her employer's feelings.

"Immeasurably dear," he averred, ignoring her satire, "for it's price is above rubies, isn't it?"

He looked down critically in the fair face, crowned with its piquant brown curls, capped by the little Tam-o'-Shanter bonnet. And Gowan condescended to forget her displeasure by meeting his eyes and joining in his gay laughter.

"And the rest of your property?" she



"Then you are 'Count Hubert?'" cried Francis.

queried sarcastically. "I suppose you could not bear to lose sight of any of it, and the whole troupe will be coming this way."

"You are cruel," he said sotto voce. "The whole troupe can be drowned in St. Michael's Bay, for aught I care!"

"That would turn the Dawson City variety entertainment into tragedy instead of comedy," replied Gowan, with a droll air of reflection that was simply irresistible.

And then they both laughed again, and, having arrived at the Henderson tents, she said prettily:

"If you like to come in and have pot-luck with us you're welcome, unless the Hotel Royal tempts you in preference."

The mention of the rough wooden shanty bearing such high-sounding title was sufficient to rouse once more their light-hearted merriment, and when it was over Count Hubert observed:

"My temptation lies here, I assure you"—with ardor enough to satisfy the vainest of hostesses. "And now," he added, "I'm off to settle for the packing of my goods and chattels with that arbitrary old aboriginal 'Chief of the Chilkoots,' alias 'Chief of Cheats.'"

"Oh, shame!" she reproved. "Isaac is the blessing of the place, and the most amiable, reasonable creature imaginable. He would do anything for me."

"Yet know this, O queen of our hearts, I've been told there's not one of these redskins, however hard and fast you engage him, but will pitch one's pack in the gutter and pick up that of another traveler who offers him a dollar more."

"Not Lulu, I reckon; the faithful old fellow my father has left in charge of his claim," said Gowan stoutly. "You should hear dad's tales of his devotion."

"Which, with all due respect to your sire, let us hope you, too, may prove, my dear lady," laughed Count Hubert, as he waved an airy adieu.

A reply that somewhat irritated Gowan's high spirit, and kept recurring unaccountably to her mind.

There was one black hour in the future when they were both to remember it too well!

CHAPTER IV.

"You?"

"You?"

The two men thus apostrophizing each other in German fell back a step on the river-bank, and stood face to face, exchanging a stare of astonishment, in which was betokened no good-will.

Count Hubert was the first to recover himself, and gave vent to a laugh of forced friendliness.

"Rugen, by all that's miraculous!" he exclaimed, still speaking in his native tongue. "This beats all! What in the world are you doing here? You are not in for the Klondyke fever, surely?"

A flush rose on Francis' cheek at the covert contempt in the tone.

"And why not?" he answered, a trifle sharply.

"What are you doing here yourself, Hu?"

The other hastily anticipated his old comrade's utterance of his name.

"Count Hubert, owner and managing-director of the Dawson City Variety Entertainment, very much at your service," he said, sweeping off his smasher hat with the swagger of the student of the olden days Francis now so keenly remembered.

And then Francis fell back still further, and his pale face went paler still.

"You are Count Hubert?" he cried, as if he had not heard aright.

"It surprises you, does it?" was the answering query. "Well, my dear fellow, I am the Count So-and-So fast enough, since the old man died three months ago. You haven't heard that? But, between ourselves, it suits me to be incoog, just at present, so give me away at your peril! Got into rather a tight fix crossing xwoppe with a fellow at Baden. Stupid affair, forget what it was now—some woman's bouquet at the ball, I believe. Anyhow, I ran my man through and had to cut it."

"But I'm in for fresh game now. See no end of tin in it, and lots of amusement. I've bought up the going concern of a comedy company in 'Frisco, am trotting the lot out to Klondyke, and have got in

tow the sweetest nightingale you ever set eyes on to fetch diggers.

"She's got to make my fortune before I'm done with her. I expect when you spot my Gowan you'll want to fiddle to her! Ha! ha! glorious idea! Name your own dollars a week, my friend, and the thing's done!"

"I know Miss Henderson already, and I'm going out to strike oil in her father's claim, not to fiddle," said Francis, with a flush born of annoyance both on his own account and Gowan's.

"No offense, my dear fellow," the count hastened to aver. "And you know the Hendersons? Ach! what a small world it is! And the more reason the past should be blank, eh?" he added, in tones meant to be doubly conciliatory.

"The past and I have parted company forever," was the calm reply of Francis. His face was pale now as it had been flushed.

"So," queried the other indulgently, "like a sensible man, you've forsworn the false Ericas? A new flame perhaps, eh? Going to make your pile for her, and live serenely ever after? Well, by-by. See you soon again, no doubt." And he was away swinging along the river path, whistling blithely as he went.

Francis Rugen passed on in the opposite direction with a lagging spirit. The buoyancy had gone from his spirit also. His heart was like lead within him.

That cruel past that he had thought buried beyond reach and sprung open, like a yawning abyss, at his feet. He saw himself tottering once more on its brink, drawn downward by a subtle influence stronger far than his own weak will.

And Gowan! With the remembrance of her his brain reeled. Oh, that she should be at the mercy of this man, whom he knew to be unworthy to touch as much as the hem of her garment!

His smouldering love, but just acknowledged to himself, burst to flame in that moment of passionate desire to protect her at all costs. And now, alas! was that in his power to do?

Like an answer there came in a flash a realization of that faith by which he had been plucked as a brand from the burning. Yes, so surely, even in these far wilds of Alaska, help was near ready to be given "with a strong hand and a stretched-out arm."

The struggling, terror-stricken soul of the weak man prostrated itself in an anguished appeal for strength and guidance to fight to the death this evil waiting to assail both himself and the woman he held so dear; but his bitterest prayer was for Gowan.

CHAPTER V.

It had begun in earnest—the terrible ascent of the Chilkoot pass.

Three more days had gone by getting the various outfits transported from Dyea to Sheep's Camp, the last point at the foot of the summit on the river-bank, before the dreaded steep began.

Gowan had grown used to having her sleeping-tent pitched in strange and divers places; to fall asleep one night to the lullaby of the bounding rapids, the next to be hushed in the almost deathlike stillness of the snow-mountain's spruce-wood slopes.

It was a life of unparalleled adventure, with, so far, no discomfort to speak of; for the party was well provided with everything necessary to make the journey fairly pleasant and expeditious.

And Gowan's mood was one of constant vivacity and amiable endurance. She prided herself in proving to the men who was as able to climb as they. She was the life and soul of their number, in centering her favors broadcast, and of winning the hearts of each in turn.

With Count Hubert's advent she had

come to know her conquest of Francis to be complete, for he followed her about with a silent, dog-like devotion that now and then caused her no little compunction. The coquetical desire to win it had almost lost its charm once she knew it was hers to take or reject.

It was Roy, stern, unbending, with always that look of calm disapproval in his blue eyes, whose heart's citadel she strove to storm in vain.

She gloried in fawning to Count Hubert's lightest wish to see the fiery flush of annoyance that swept Roy's young face thereon.

She claimed it as her prerogative to be worshipped and feted. She looked upon it all as an innocent diversion to wile away the weary hours of the Arctic day, and she was wholly unprepared for the condemnation that fell at last from Roy's lips, unable to keep their peace longer.

These days seemed like years to Roy, since that ill-fated morning when Francis had come to him and poured out in his ear his knowledge of the man who held Gowan's welfare in his hands.

For Francis, in the allegiance of his strong gratitude to Roy, deemed it only Roy's right to know the bitter secret of his friendship with Hubert; and, in doing so, had betrayed on a too plainly the love for Gowan which filled his own breast.

Roy seemed so stoic and strong; it never struck the elder but weaker man that every word he spoke went like a dagger to Roy's heart.

She must be warned against him, Roy had said simply. And then Francis flushed like a schoolboy.

"I would not dare!" he cried. "She would take it as an insult! She would never forgive me!"

"Then must speak, and though she doesn't forgive me it won't much matter," Roy answered grimly.

And now he had spoken. They were climbing the great white ridge, nearing the summit, for it was the third day of their journey through the pass. For ahead the Indians toiled nimbly, bent beneath the heavy packs piled upon the gay blankets binding their shoulders.

The horses, perforce discarded at the foot of the steep trail, had been replaced by sturdy dogs, dragging the sledges laden with outfits.

One huge St. Bernard, owned by Francis, had conceived an ardent affection for Gowan, and now had fallen back to trot in her wake, carrying a little pack, Indian fashion, sagging on either side.

It was the dog's dumb devotion that paved the way for Roy's blunt speech.

Roy had adroitly managed to outdistance the rest of the party, and detach Gowan to his own especial care—no very difficult manoeuvre when Gowan, somewhat flattered by his unwonted attention, was pleased to resign herself willingly enough to the arrangement. But her complacency was short-lived.

Roy's heart was hot with the memory of a scene imprinted upon it the night before—the memory of Gowan springing up at Count Hubert's command to sing a certain ditty for their amusement. They had been in the midst of the savage desolation of the great White Pass. The icy rocks and stunted pine-trees had echoed to the chorals, taken up by the rough campaigners, squatted in their rude encampments far and near.

I don't want to play in your yard, I don't like you any more. was the refrain.

The flickering light of the oil-lamp, swinging from the tent-roof, had fallen upon Gowan's uplifted face, glorifying it with a halo, out of which it glowed like the face of an angel.

The sight had filled Roy with an acute desire to spring up and lead her away from the vulgar gaze of that strangely-assorted

audience; but, most of all, from the exasperating attentions of Count Hubert, which aroused Roy's resentment to fever-heat.

There had come the same look of rapturous beauty on Gowan's face at this moment as she had turned and bestowed a caress upon the faithful St. Bernard's head.

She was clad in a martin-fur coat and a Tam-o'-Shanter cap, from beneath which the little brown curls of her silky hair peeped invitingly. The freshening breeze had fanned the pink glow of perfect health on her cheeks, swept just now by the dark, curly lashes that scarcely hid, but intensified, the light in her eyes.

Roy found himself wondering how it was possible the glory of those eyes could so find expression in their lashes' slender line.

"I think the heart of a dog is just perfect," she was saying softly, more addressing the St. Bernard than Roy. "It must be beautiful to be loved as these creatures love us! I believe this one would die for me if need be."

"I've no doubt his master would be willing to do the same," said Roy dryly. Then he flushed, hating himself for the jealous pang that had prompted his impetuous words.

He saw the line of Gowan's red lips straighten.

"I dare say some of our hearts are as true as our dogs' you know"—he tried to soften his former speech with a touch of railleury; "we're not made of cast-iron."

"I think you are!" And, had he known it, there was some bitterness behind her laughing satire.

"But I'm not, really," he answered earnestly enough; "and, to prove it, I'm going to say something to you, as I might—as a true man would—to—to to any woman," he broke off lamely.

She shot him a swift glance from beneath her thick lashes, and, at sight of his evident agitation, leant on her alpenstock to say, with insinuating coyness:

"Not to one of those hideous squaws, who daub their cheeks with brown grease, just as we on the stage use powder and paint to make ourselves look pretty?"

Roy had been perilously near betraying himself; but these words of hers were just such as he needed to lash him anew to his self-imposed task.

"I was not joking," he said stiffly. "If you had never known the contamination of the stage, you would understand no powder or paint could ever make you so pretty as you are without them. You—"

Gowan had interrupted him with a curtesy of mock gratification.

"We grow complimentary! This is interesting! Go on."

"I am going on," said Roy sturdily; "but you won't have to complain of compliments. I am going to speak plainly, at peril of offending you—to warn you to beware of an evil influence as false as—as the very stage itself that you delight in!"

Gowan drew a sharp breath.

"Now it smells of battle at last!" she laughed. "I am to beware of an evil influence as false as the thing I delight in. Yes, that is very plain—more plain than politics, but I guess I'll make no rash promises, as I'm rather at a loss what the evil influence can be in this lone land."

"I don't suppose you mean it's the demon of my own wicked self you wish me to exorcise, though you're so very outspoken. I reckon it's just possible."

She turned and looked up into his face with a droll air of bewitching penitence; but Roy was no match for her levity.

"Gowan," he said, forcefully addressing her by the name imprinted on his heart, "it's the man you call Count Hubert I distrust, and ask you, as you value your happiness, to believe I have reason for my warning. If it were any good I would entreat you, even yet, to retract your prom-

ine to him; but I suppose it is quite useless."

She looked at him in astonishment, but with a flutter of secret satisfaction in her breast.

"Quite useless," she repeated saucily. "Really your audacity is amazing! And what can you possibly know of Count Hubert?"

"Enough to fire me at the very sight of him near you," answered Roy with some heat.

"Do you propose I should quarrel with my manager to appease your jealousy?" she laughed. "Oh, the conceit of you lords of creation!" Then all at once she let her full voice float out through the great whiteness in the mocking bravado of the stirring air:

Like lassie has her laddie,
Ne'er a one ha's I;
But a' the lads they lo'e me weel,
And what the waur am I?

With the concluding words she peeped up roguishly in her companion's face. The action was fatal to her triumph.

An instant before Roy had been carried away by the glory of her rich notes, the rapture of her presence.

Now he suddenly bethought himself this witchery was, with her, but a trick of the stage, a forte of the "play-actor," whose role he would so sternly condemn.

His whole nature rose in rebellion. Francis—himself—was she not striving to bring both to her feet? How had he ever thought it possible she could influence Francis for good—that his own heart could suffer to relinquish her?

He faced her, almost fiercely. "Girl," he began in a voice of thunder, "I was speaking to you seriously and in return you flout me with your foolery, your—"

His brusque speech stuck in his throat. No, he could not deny it! He was one of the "lads who lo'ed her weel," in spite of all!

Gowan had tragically lifted her handkerchief to her eyes.

I don't want to play your yard,
If you won't be good to me.

she whimpered in a piteous little voice. The charm and despair of it was irresistible. Roy found himself impetuously touching the hand holding the handkerchief.

"Don't mind me! I'm a brute to have been so rough with you; but if you only knew of the despicable things Francis Rugen has told me of this man— There! I've said more than I meant, and betrayed his confidence, but it will be safe with you, won't it?"

Gowan's handkerchief had dropped, and she was regarding him with brilliant eyes far removed from tears.

"You dull wretch! Why didn't you tell me before it was Francis Rugen who knew him?"

Her scorn, and the conviction that she had not been crying after all, roused Roy's ire again.

"What difference does it make which of us knew him?" he demanded, "so long as the result is the same?"

"The result is not the same," she answered imperiously. "Since it is Francis, I— I understand, and am convinced. Before, I thought it was simply you who were jealous." She brought out the adjective with a little glance of scornful defiance that was so much more fuel to the flame of his wrath.

"I am quite out of it," he said brusquely. Since she valued his advice so lightly, at least she should never know the pain her contempt of that advice inflicted.

"I warned you," he went on, with less calmness, "as any decent fellow would who hates to see a friend at the mercy of a man like the count. A man can judge other men as women can't," Roy added recklessly, "and your calling is the hardest in the world in which a woman can keep

herself, like Caesar's wife, above suspicion."

Gowan stopped and flung herself down on the precipitous slope. There was a flush of mingled anger and mortification upon her lovely face—anger at his bluntness, mortification that she had failed to subdue him to her charms.

"Please, that will do," she said haughtily. "I am at the mercy of no one, or nothing, but your own very bad taste and rude temper. And after your disparaging remarks upon my profession I refuse to go



Roy fired two shots in quick succession, then a huge body went rolling down.

another step in your company. You have quite convinced me how much I hate you. You can go now. I shall wait for the others."

In what manner Roy would have met this emphatic declaration of war was to remain a mystery, for, with sudden and seething swiftness, an avalanche of ice and snow swept the precipice, and would have carried Gowan with it had not the St. Bernard caught the skirt of her fur coat in his teeth.

Roy, with a hoarse exclamation, flung his arm around her, holding her in a fierce embrace, whilst his other hand clung with desperate clutch to the trunk of the stunted pine-tree against which she had leant.

The next instant another cry of greater peril passed his lips as the cause of the commotion flashed upon his sight, and he had to let go the tree's support, and to stand up and grasp the rifle swung across his shoulder.

Two shots in quick succession, then a huge, shaggy body rushed close past, with a bellowing snort, to go rolling down, dead, in the whirling snow.

It was a black bear, strayed from its home in the dense growth of spruce-woods, and driven by hunger to make raid upon the first traveler within its reach for, as a rule, the bears are found to be comparatively inoffensive in the early part of the Summer.

At least, such was the explanation with which Roy sought to assure the terrified girl, who, at the critical moment, had proved herself as brave as himself; but, now the reaction had come, she clung to him, sobbing with an hysterical emotion that unmanned Roy far more than that hideous peril which was past and one.

Wild words of passionate love surged

to his lips, to be as instantly repressed with the stern, stoic control which comes naturally to the hardened Northerner.

Roy put her out of his arms calmly, almost coldly, for had she not said she hated him? "The memory of those words could never be effaced. Nothing he could say would undo them. It was not his nature to plead for pity in place of scorn."

He supported her to the fallen tree, and stood over her consolingly, though now he spoke no word. It seemed like hours, or even days, since her tongue had dealt him that stinging lash.

Would she not acknowledge its cruelty and retract it even yet?

He looked down upon her and waited, expectant, breathless.

The rest of the party, alarmed by the rifle-shots, were hastening towards them in ones and twos up the slope.

Far away eastward came a glimpse of the long, narrow valley, studded with interminable lakes and streams, stretching nearer and nearer to the golden Yukon.

A great yearning came upon Roy as he stood there in the white silence to take Gowan's hand and turn back yet from the far-off goal. There would never come to them another moment in life like this. He knew it only too well. But his lips were sealed.

Her sob ceased, and she looked up in his face.

"I've lost my alpenstock," she said tragically.

The remark fell upon Roy like a shock. He had been waiting, waiting for some words of pleading contrition, and this was all that was in her thoughts!

His smooth lips took a sterner line, his bronzed cheek blanched ever so little. It seemed as if something in his heart had snapped.

And Gowan! By that strange affinity with which the thoughts of others are sometimes borne in upon our brain, as she gazed up in his clear-cut, boyish face she read all she had expected and hoped.

She arose impetuously. She would have cried out "Forgive me! I never meant I hated you!" but pride intervened. He had refused to yield to her beguiling, he held her profession in distrust and disdain. Nothing could remove the sting of that—not even the saving of her life!

"How can I ever manage without my alpenstock?" was what she exclaimed.

"You must take my hand," said Roy, holding it out. But he spoke coldly.

"I suppose I have got to," rejoined Gowan, with a fine air of reluctance. And she looked down at her moccasins-clad little feet, pouting prettily.

Roy's arm dropped. He leant his back to a jutting ridge of rough trachyte.

"We'll wait for the rest. I dare say they can help us out of the difficulty," he said, so brusquely that Gowan, with a sense of pique and outraged pride, turned her attention forthwith to the dog, fawning upon him, and addressing him by divers endearing epithets, for having come to her rescue in the whirling snow.

Roy stood silent, gazing blindly over the great white world.

The supreme moment had come and gone. She had not spoken, and they could never be just the same to each other any more.

CHAPTER VI.

Dawson City in the autumn of '97 was not the quiet haven on the river-bank it may possibly have been before the magic name of Klondyke had lured prospectors to flock thither from the now deserted metropolis of Circle City.

It was a large encampment of log huts, run up in fifty-foot streets—by name, First Avenue, Second Avenue, and so on—and boasting a population of four thousand souls.

There were supply stores and restaurants; and there were banks, where bags

cramped with gold-dust were stacked beneath the counters, waiting to be claimed by their jubilant owners; where money was lent to less fortunate miners at ruinous rates of interest, to be paid up with the produce of their winter's work, when, by the aid of fire to thaw the flinty ground, it should be possible to glean the harvest of their claims.

There were gin-palaces also, where the fatal "fire-water poured more freely than the purer beverage, which was all the Indians once knew. Saloons, where by night the kerosene-lamps blazed wildly, in rivalry to the garish Arctic twilight, and rough men and women drank and danced and gambled and lost and won fortunes, for which they had so toiled in vain.

One of these saloons, in the heart of the township, was a double-roomed log building of large dimensions.

Above the doorway in imposing letters it bore the sign "Dawson City Variety Entertainment Hall," and in red-painted posters adorning either side was the glaring announcement, which had been painted there some five months previously:

GOWAN IS COMING!
WHO IS GOWAN?
GOWAN IS OUR STAR!

Within the walls were festooned with flags and Chinese lanterns.

It was furnished with rows of benches round about, and at one end was a gaudy stage, twinkling with footlights, and boasting of a marvelous drop-scene. A grand piano stood in the corner. The rest of the orchestra consisted of a guitar, two violins, a cello, and divers wind instruments, manipulated by artists of varying standards.

In their midst Gowan Henderson fitted and thrilled like a radiantly bedizened nightingale. Her presence was the lodestone to bring many a digger tramping in from camp a dozen miles away, night after night. Too often, alas! he retired to the enticing bar adjoining, when the band at last struck up "Lights out."

It was at such an hour one night in October that Gowan stepped out at the stage-door of the Variety Hall, to find Count Hubert standing in place of her usual escort, the faithful Indian, Lulu.

He was waiting there to accompany her home to the neat, pine-rolled, canvas-roofed hut on the outskirts of the town, where old Henderson had established his daughter under the care of Lulu and the Californian ayah who had "mothered" Gowan, and braved all the terrors of the far Northwest to serve her darling still.

Uncle Mac himself sojourned between Gowan's home and the ruder shanties on Bonanza Creek, where Roy and Francis had toiled through the long, hot Summer months with pick and shovel, at the windlass and bucket.

And now the sacks of gold had multiplied as the weeks drifted on, and summer heat was changed to autumn chill, and the mosquitoes grew less tiresome, and the long day was waning towards long night.

To Gowan, indeed, the time had seemed doubly long since the far-off early summer, when the great pass had been left behind, and the adventurous journey by lakes and rapids, with all its attendant hardships of boat-building and sledge-packing, ended at last in arrival at the rough station henceforth to be her home.

The novelty of it all had palled. Even the reckless flirtation with Count Hubert had set herself to glory in, as if in direct opposition to Roy's warning, was losing point and charm.

"Don't be afraid I shall betray your secret about the count," she had said to Francis boldly; "but I guess I'm going to avenge you in the one way I know how."

And then Francis, in a burst of worship and gratitude, had laid his heart at her feet.

He "wanted no revenge, but the sweet

possession of her love. Give him that, and he would win a fortune for her, come what might!"

Adulation was second nature to Gowan, and though she protested a little and made stipulation she should at least be free from promise until her engagement at the Dawson City Variety Entertainment was concluded, she accepted his devotion as her due; and the caprice to avenge his bygone wrongs became, little by little, a determination of stronger significance.

And it seemed as if her ambition was to be realized at last this night, as she passed out into the grey light by Hubert's side.

His face was flushed with wine, and there was an air of suppressed triumph in his voice when he answered Gowan's observation that she thought she had seen Francis Ruyz in the hall.

"Yes. We were having a flutter at the tables, and I left him at a little go of poker. At the rate he was raking in the gold-dust, he ought to break the bank before I get back. My star was so brilliant to-night she lured me away from such vulgar amusement."

It struck her unpleasantly that Francis should be hanging over the gaming table in preference to accompanying her home, as he at once had invariably done on other nights when he came into Dawson City to hear her sing.

She found herself wondering was his practice of winning gold thus becoming a regular one, and did Roy know of it.

"Back to me, I wanted to have a talk with you, my fair Gowan," said Count Hubert—"quite a serious talk; so you must come in and sup with me."

He led her, without waiting for permission, within the doors of a gorgeously lighted restaurant—a rough shanty, boasting innumerable little pine tables, in addition to the inevitable "bar."

Gowan suffered herself to be seated at one of these, whilst her companion ordered of the best the buffet could supply.

Again she thought of Roy, and what he would think to see her there, and a little flush of shame deepened the stage-paint still upon her cheek.

Then she let her cloak drop from her dazzling shoulders. Her triumph was surely at hand, and she would revel in it to the full.

Count Hubert filled her glass with sparkling fluid, and clinked his own tumbler with hers ere he raised it to his lips.

"Success to my Imperial Gowan and our happy contract!" he cried. "Has it occurred to you, my dear, it will be out at the end of this month?"

"Yes; and I'm glad," said Gowan, her eyes fixed demurely on her champagne glass.

He laughed. "And that its time we made a new one? Ah! is it not so?"

He laughed again confidently.

"I did not say that," answered Gowan.

Her eyes were lifted, and she was looking at him with all the magnificence of her beauty concentrated in the radiant depths of those brown orbs.

"Then you shall say it now!" exclaimed the count. The already copious draughts of fiery spirits had mounted to his brain, and there was more of bravado in his voice and mien.

"It's to be a much better contract this time, Gowan. We've both had enough of Klondyke. I am going to take my star away and make her a countess. She is going to give herself to me."

Gowan's great eyes flashed, full of strange exultant fire.

"A truly magnificent prospect," she said, with sarcastic composure; "but what if the star refuses to grant an honor?"

"Teach not thy lips such scorn, for they were made for kissing, lady, not for such contempt," was Hubert's bold quotation. He leaned across the little table, and, ob-

livious of the crowded room, kissed her lovely mouth.

Gowan sprang to her feet, her cheeks blazing, her bosom heaving. The triumph she had plotted for and so ardently coveted was swallowed up in the overwhelming humiliation by which it had been attained. She had often pictured this hour, but never thus.

She picked up her cloak, and drew it round her with trembling fingers.

"Let me pass!" she said in a voice of passion; "and follow me if you dare!"

"Dare?" he repeated, barring her way. "I'll dare more than that, my sweet Gowan! Come, go back to your seat and don't be prudish. It'll be all one when you're the countess, you know."

He put his arms around her, as if again to kiss her; but, with a little cry, Gowan sprang aside, and the table, with its contents, reeled and clattered to the ground.

"Oh, is there no man in the place who will protect me from this insolent villain?" she cried out.

In truth, she had that moment caught sight of a face in the groups that had made her heart stand still.

With two strides Roy was beside her. Although he wore the same rough, high boots and mackinaw suit as the rest, among all those haggard and bearded miners his shaven, boyish face showed conspicuously out of place; and there was a set look of leonine power upon it—power to do or to endure—that told Gowan at a glance he had seen that kiss which still burned upon her lips.

"Come with me out of this!" he addressed her, almost fiercely.

At Gowan's appeal Count Hubert had released her with a contemptuous shrug of his shoulders; but the whole room had risen in uproar. Instinctively the men took sides, divided betwixt reverence for their prima donna and loyalty to her manager, whose saloon was the most popular in all Dawson City.

The lights had somehow got extinguished, and in the half-darkness the crowd surged round the frightened girl and her protector, knocking over tables and chairs in its course. Suddenly a revolver flashed out, aimed randomly by a half-drunk digger at Roy, and accompanied by the admonition:

"Hold hard, doctor! Let the count have his pickin'!" While another, mimicking Roy's nationality, hiccupped glibly: "Hoots, mon! what's all about? An' him a count, bless your heart! A lass on the hall shouldna be puttickler!" All of which was met by an uproarious protest from the opposite party against "Kerryin' things too far, and count or no count, they wouldn't suffer their society ways!"

Then all at once there was a whisper anent a scarlet-coated police-orderly. And whilst the cabin cleared as if by magic, Roy hurriedly led his charge out into the still night, and away along the pine-fringed river.

His fury was too great for speech. As for Gowan, she was trembling in every limb.

And then, at the roughness of his tones, she burst into tears, and, withdrawing her hand from his arm, walked alone, weeping silently. Her piteous dignity would have appealed to the sternest of hearts; but Roy's was for the moment bitterly hardened.

"How could you have come to put yourself in both cad's power, Gowan? Are you in the habit of going in to these places with him?"

"No, I'm not!" said Gowan, as haughtily as her flowing tears would permit. "And, please, what right have you to ask, anyway?"

"None," answered Roy brusquely. And he relapsed into a stern silence, harder far for her to bear than his rebuke.

All too soon it grew unendurable, and she broke into such wild sobs that Roy drew nearer and masterfully recovered her hand.

"What's done can't be undone," he said, with rough tenderness. "It must never occur again, that's all! I only fear we haven't done with to-night's business yet. You rightly called that man a villain, Gowan; but you don't half know how bad he is. Won't you agree with me, at least, this music-hall is no place for you? However true and pure a woman may be, such a life must rob her of her glory."

He was speaking rather incoherently, with enforced calm, for he was more moved than he cared she should know; and again Gowan snatched her hand away in mortal offense.

"You are quite wrong!" she said, with hysterical hauteur. "I brought all this on myself to-night. I made up my mind long ago to make the man love me, just to have the pleasure of laughing at him for his pains, as I did!" she broke off defiantly.

"Is that your idea of pleasure—to make men love you for you to laugh at them?" In the grey light Roy was looking at her, a sort of pained reproach in his gaze; yet it was of neither the count nor himself he was thinking. It was of Francis.

She laughed through her tears.

"Oh, how dense you are! Don't you know who the count was? And I reckoned I would pay him out for all the injury he has done Francis. It was all for Francis's sake I wanted revenge." She broke down again and sobbed afresh.

Then it was true, and Francis had won her heart! But it was a moment before Roy found his voice, so say softly, with almost tender pleading:

"Dear, don't you believe there is One who can revenge all our wrongs a thousand times better than we? It is God who has said, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.'"

Gowan's steps had quickened, and she was gazing straight before her, with a strange look of passion in her eyes.

"Why should I believe?" she cried. "If there is a God at all, He does not love us, for He does not give us what we want. Would a just God let such a wretch as Count Hubert live? Oh, your God is a myth! This wicked world was never made by a God!"

"Gowan! Gowan! stop!" And if she had turned she might have seen the fire in Roy's eyes, even through that dim twilight.

"It is because God loves us He will not give us what is not for our good. It is only this hard world which can prove us gold or dross, wheat or chaff."

She turned then and faced him.

"And I am of the dross and the chaff!" she laughed bitterly. "Oh, it is easy for you to keep your belief. You bury yourself out there at the creek. You would blush to be seen in the music-hall. You are one of those who say, 'Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?'"

"You don't know that I—yes, even I—have saved Francis night after night from haunting that man's gambling-den! You don't know that he is there to-night! You will be ready to say it is I who have led him there; but there are other places he would have gone to if not there."

"You, who are so strong, do not understand what such a temptation is to a nature like his. You don't see that the count's influence is gaining on yours and—yes, I will say it, though you do despise me so!—and mine!"

She had spoken with such breathless passion, carried away by the bitterness of her suffering, that she never saw the anguish of amazement which had swept Roy's face. Now he stopped and caught her two hands with a passion surpassing her own.

"Gowan, is this true? Oh, how blind I have been!"

In a flash he saw it all. How, in the selfishness of his own jealous love, to spare himself the pain of seeing her, he had failed in his stewardship to the friend committed to his care. And a wild thought to

tell her the truth and exonerate himself in her eyes rushed over him tumultuously.

"Gowan! Gowan!" he cried out, "I do not despise you!—I—I lo—"

Alas, of what account would his love be to this woman-heart, which had proved itself so staunch to the lover it sought to save—which, despite its scientific scepticism, had brought home to his own clearer faith that world-worn question, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

His hands dropped, and the exaltation went out of his voice.

"Gowan," he said hoarsely, "I deserve your reproach."

CHAPTER VII.

Count Hubert had marched back to the Variety Hall in a rage.

To be baffled, and by a woman, roused his irritation to fever-heat, and there was a dangerous light in his black eyes as he made his way straight to the roulette-table, where Francis stood staking his last bag of gold-dust, which answered for coined-money, on the turn of fortune's wheel.

Its tide for him had turned, and he was losing now as recklessly as he had been playing a winning game an hour earlier. Unlike the count, he had no recourse to draughts of fiery stimulant. It was the one pledge to Ian Cameron he had kept inviolate, despite many other backslidings, and it was the fierce determination of the gambler alone with gloved in the haggard eyes he lifted at Hubert's approach.

"I'm broke!" he said gruffly—"dead broke!"

"I'll stand a cut with you to set you on your legs again in exchange for a favor," said the count, eyeing the table critically.

"What is the favor?" asked Francis. But already his hand had gone out greedily towards a greasy pack of cards.

"Time enough to know when you've won the bet," said the count, throwing down a roll of notes with a short laugh.

The cards were shuffled. Francis won. He was exultant now as he had been downcast.

The game began. He bet the limit, and won again—again. His cheeks flushed, his hands were trembling. He "raised," and once more he won. A little crowd had gathered around to watch the combat.

Bets grew apace on the issue, as time after time the opponents "raised" each other—Francis with reckless excitement, Hubert with sinister calm, notwithstanding divers drinks from the glass at his elbow.

At last, having emptied his pockets of notes and gold, he "saw" his antagonist, to use the technical term of the game, which virtually ended it.

In spite of his losses, the count stretched across the table and shook the victor by the hand.

Francis was sweeping up the stakes with feverish haste. He had won a sum close upon six hundred pounds.

From the adjoining saloon still came the sound of hilarious dancing, to the scraping of a violin, though the chilly morning air now whizzed in through the parchment-pen windows, flaring the evil-smelling lamps.

The weird scene, with those roughly-clad men and women, suddenly palled upon Francis' finer senses with overwhelmingly force. Once the fierce fascination of the play was over the fever was dying out from his veins.

He was beginning to loathe himself, as, too often before reaction had brought self-contempt and anguish of soul.

"The favor?" he addressed Hubert, almost brusquely. "What is it?"

"A mere trifle in comparison to your gains," was Hubert's reply. But he spoke nervously.

They had passed out into the grey dawn, and they walked on a pace or two before Francis again asked, somewhat irritably: "What is it?"

He was to know all too soon.

"The simplest thing in the world," spoke Hubert then. "I merely require you to contrive that the estimable Uncle Mac shall be kept fully employed at the Bonanza Creek for the next two days, to prevent his return home, that's all."

For an instant Francis regarded his companion in puzzled surprise; then suddenly a look of suspicion leapt to his eyes.

"What for?" he demanded.

The count shrugged his shoulders. "Ach!"—he drew a long breath—"that's my affair, my friend, with which you have no concern."

"But I have concern!" burst the tempestuous reply from Francis. For somehow Hubert's airy answer subtly confirmed his fears. "You have some base reason to wish for his absence."

He lifted his arm, as if to deal a blow; then overcame the impulse by a strong effort.

"Once for all, I tell you I will have none of it! You—you—"

Words failed him, even in the native German in which they had conversed, to speak the contempt and rage which filled his heart to suffocation.

The count laughed.

"So?" he queried. "Nevertheless, I hold you responsible to fulfil your part of our bet to-night. I didn't hand you over six hundred quid for nothing. It's not the first time you've helped on a lark, so you needn't try to fight any nowadays."

Whilst he spoke Francis had been clearing his pockets of the notes and little bags of gold, the touch of which now burnt his fingers like live coals. He thrust them all into Hubert's hand.

"Take back your money!" he cried. "If the devil claimed me once, he shall no longer. After this you and I are done with each other. And I warn you, if harm comes to Gowan, it will be across my dead body!"

"That may be very probable, my friend!" muttered the count, his fingers closing involuntarily over the revolver in his coat pocket, as the retreating footsteps of Francis died away in the silence.

"So the little Erica has been ousted by the star! Ha! ha! But the star is mine—mine! My redskins and I will prove that without you, friend Francis! Yes, Gowan, my nightingale, you flouted me to-night! You shall learn who's master! You scorned to be a countersmith, forsooth! When I've got you safe at Circle City, you'll be glad to own whatever name I choose to give you!"

Francis was rushing blindly towards the pine-log frame-house on the river bank.

The fresh air blew coolly on his heated brow, but did not allay the burning fever raging in his brain; for it was as if a sword had been plunged into his heart, opening anew the bitter wounds of the bygone past. The better nature of the man had been roused, and had some battle with the evil part and had been victorious. Yet the victory was a desperate one, for, in the calm that came after, he was as a rudderless wheel, drifting over a wide sea.

Gowan! what right had he to dream of Gowan? He, a gambler, ready to sell his soul for gold whilst the vice held him in its relentless grip. He shuddered.

And it was to win riches for Gowan he had first drifted back into the old downward path! The irony of it mocked him, for he knew, alas! he had learnt to follow it for his own sake.

His love was too generous to take refuge in the thought that Gowan had been possessed of Roy's stronger and clearer faith it would have been easier to strive to "fight the good fight" with so sweet a guide.

He only realized, all too late, broken resolutions, violated vows.

He had relied on his own strength to resist the influence of buried years. He had ignored a Redeemer, he had forgotten a God.

And he had failed—failed—failed!

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CHAPTER VIII.

When Roy Henderson bade Gowan farewell at her cabin door it was not to continue his long tramp to his own distant shanty, but to turn his steps once more towards Dawson City. Gowan's tale of Francis had moved him profoundly, and with every step he took himself more and more to task for his remissness. His work of rescue must begin now without delay.

But when he reached the Variety Hall Francis was no longer there, and he spent a fruitless hour going from place to place in his vain search.

It was with a heavy heart that he turned at length on his homeward track. That Francis had evidently torn himself away from the city's attractions, to return to his work at the creek, did not assuage his anxiety, for how could he tell in what state of mind the gambler had gone thither? The owner of unholy gains or a bankrupt?

It was still that dark, wierd twilight, through the early morning was far advanced. And as he neared the little house, backed by the gaunt pine-trees, and the far, undulating, snow-clad plain rising beyond the river, a shower of snow, soft and mist-like, suddenly enveloped the scene, piercing even the comfortable warmth of Roy's deer-skin overcoat.

Mechanically he made for the shelter of the doorway of the frame-house till the storm should pass, when the whining of the St. Bernard within struck strangely upon his ears.

It was the dog which had attached himself so persistently to Gowan on their journey over the pass, and which Francis had presented to her on their arrival at Dawson.

The animals' cry was one of distress. The next moment Roy had almost fallen over a prostrate figure stretched on the ground. He struck a match and held it down, shading it with his hands.

The figure belonged to Francis. His face was lifted skywards, and in that dual light an awful fear clutched at Roy's heart. For the face was the face of a dead man.

It was no time for weak dailies, and quickly Roy had knocked at the door and been admitted by the ever-wakeful Lulu. Together they carried the inert form within, and laid it on the trestle couch of Gowan's parlor, beside the glowing pine-log fire.

The dwelling was divided into four roomy compartments, two on either side of the door. The house-place, where Lulu and the dog kept guard; the living-room, which Gowan had done her best to glorify into a veritable lady's bower; and behind these the sleeping cabins of Uncle Mac and that of Gowan, shared by her devoted nurse, Wenonah.

Apart from the house was a rough shed or two, used as larder and fuel-store, and the accommodation for horses. Roy flung aside his leather mittens and heavy coat, and, kneeling down beside the still figure, laid his strong hand upon the silent heart.

No—it was not silent! There was a faint flutter beneath Roy's touch, and, springing to his feet, he flew to get restoratives to his aid.

"The paleface is not dead! Oh, say he is not dead!" appealed Lulu, the tears running down his rugged face. For, all unconsciously, Francis had endeared himself to the faithful Indian by the mere fact of his devotion to Lulu's young mistress.

The dog was fawning caressingly upon Francis' hand which hung limply over the couch. And at Lulu's words he, too, lifted up his great head and looked in Roy's face, with a dismal howl.

Roy's quick words and kindly touch swiftly reassured both; but the St. Bernard's cry had startled one gentle sleeper beyond the thin partition, and in another moment Gowan's door swung back and she stood in their midst.

In her haste she had only waited to throw a long fur cloak over her white gown, and to thrust her little feet in moccasins. Her thick, brown hair, "in all the wildness of dishevelled charms," swept her shoulders, and the lighted candle she carried in her hand lent an ethereal reflection to the face above it, wearing still the halowings of sleep, out of which it had been awakened.

"Clara, good dog, what is it?" she cried. And then her eyes fell on the little group before the fire, and the words died on her lips. For an instant she stood paralyzed, then darted forward.

Roy had turned and was looking at her, with a passionate pitiful look that mutely seemed asked her to go back.

"Dad! oh, dad, what is it?" she gasped, and fell on her knees beside the trestle. Then she saw it was not her father, but Francis. She lifted her eyes to Roy's with



Roy struck a match, and found the figure was that of Francis.

the look in them the St. Bernard had worn when he asked the same fateful question. "It is syncope," Roy strove to answer calmly that mute query. "He was evidently on his way home when the sudden cold overtook him and went to his heart. I came upon him lying like this just outside."

"He is not dead?" she cried, echoing Lulu's words, but with an intense passion. "You will save him? Oh, Roy, you will save him!"

She had never called him Roy before; and as she did so now, with that veil of nut-brown hair around her, and those glorious eyes looking up straight into his, Roy was conscious only of the indomitable will to grant her prayer if it lay in his power. With that moment he knew he would willingly lay down his life for Francis, could it give Francis back to her sweet cure.

"Heaven help me," he answered, "and I will save him!"

She thanked him with her eyes, and rose then, with a sort of dumb despair, to return to her room and complete her toilet.

The day was advancing swiftly, despite the darkness that reigned supreme; and Lulu was already making preparations for the morning repast.

He had just come from pouring out a graphic detail of the disaster in his master's ear; for honest Uncle Mac, worn out with a day's hard toil, had been sleeping the sleep of the just, unconscious of the great issue of life or death so near.

Old Wenonah had risen, and stood now wringing her hands and crooning piteously. It was Gowan alone who was calm; and as their eyes met, Roy's memory went back involuntarily to that never-to-be-forgotten hour on the great pass, when he had seen her face death without a tremor. Would her fortitude survive the strain upon it now?

Alas! he knew not how doubly terrible that strain was to be!

Whilst Gowan stood watching Francis

the St. Bernard sprang to the outer door with an angry snort, and at the same instant there was a knock, and Count Hubert's voice seeking admission.

He had often sought out his "prima-donna" at her home, on the excuse of consulting with her as to alterations in the evening's program; but never at so early an hour as this. And, with the remembrance of last night's insult hot upon her, Gowan would have refused him an interview, even had she been prepared to receive him.

Hubert, however, had caught sight of her figure through the fluttering curtain which screened her parlor-door, and, pushing Lulu aside, he strode towards it, calling her name softly but authoritatively.

Fearful of his entrance further—for she was in no mood for him to trespass upon that deathlike scene within—she lunged back the curtain and confronted him with haughty defiance.

The next instant a piercing stream from her lips would have rent the silent air, but Hubert had gagged and imprisoned her too securely in a tight embrace, to bear her out to a waiting sledge at the door. His two swarthy Indians had fallen suddenly upon the petrified Lulu, and, but for the noble St. Bernard, had speedily terminated his existence.

With a yell of rage, Claus had bounded out upon the scene; and Hubert, with cowardly fear, as swiftly released his hold upon Claus' mistress, knowing too well such outrage would meet with the St. Bernard's instant retribution.

"Dolts!" he addressed his followers fiercely, "why didn't you put a bullet through the beast first of all? Gowan!"—he spoke softly. But Gowan no longer stood unprotected.

Lulu had left his late assailants to struggle madly with the dog while he sprang to the girl's aid, his bowie-knife pointed ominously near Hubert's breast, for Hubert barred her retreat.

A stinging bullet through Lulu's arm from the revolver at Hubert's belt put a momentary stop to the old Indian's devotion; but Herbert had reckoned without his host, for that shot was the beginning of the end.

Seizing Lulu's knife, Gowan backed within the curtain, her captor in pursuit, and there he stopped, appalled.

Well aware of Uncle Mac's usual start for the creek at a much earlier hour, he had now expected the mere resistance of the aged Wenonah, and the unlooked-for presence of the three men paralyzed him.

That shot, and the simultaneous cry that had burst from Gowan's now-released lips, had done what all Roy's restoratives had failed to do—roused Francis from his fatal trance. And it was he who darted forward with superhuman strength, thrusting himself in front of the terrified girl.

In one wild instant he had realized the meaning of it all; whilst Uncle Mac, and even Roy, stood aghast.

It was only for a second the count paused, like a stag at bay.

Then his revolver was in his hand again, and he was firing at the three men in quick succession.

Francis staggered and fell, groaning, as a bullet whizzing past tore open his sleeve and grazed his arm; but it was the genial old mine-owner who dropped without a moan, shot through the heart.

Before the count could fire again, Roy was upon him, and they were away together in a deadly struggle for possession of the revolver. And then it was that Gowan's courage, with all the awful passion of despair, reasserted itself.

She sprang between them, her arm uplifted to plunge Lulu's knife in Hubert's breast.

"Hubert von Nickish!" she cried, with a pitiless laugh, "this is Klondyke justice—a life for a life!"

"My darling, you shall not!"

It was Roy's voice, hoarse with emotion, and Roy's hand, in a desperate clutch upon her wrist, that stayed the frantic impulse.

Her arm dropped, and with a bitter, sobbing cry she flung herself on her dead father's breast.

But the faithful St. Bernard's work was still unfinished. Fresh from the blood of the Indians, he bounded upon the scene as, at Roy's relaxed hold, Hubert plucked a fresh revolver from his belt.

All too surely the dog understood the action, and, with a howl of rage, turned upon his enemy, who rushed madly out into the whirling snow, shooting as he went.

But the end was at hand. And as Count Hubert's last frenzied cry mingled with the death-howl of the gallant St. Bernard and the exultant shout of Lulu, Roy shuddered, for he knew that Gowan was avenged indeed.

CHAPTER IX.

Fearfully Roy knelt beside Francis's unconscious but motionless form.

One look had told him that good Uncle Mac had passed that magic "threshold of the world unknown."

For Francis, was there no hope? Was his successor all too late?

The distraught Wenonah had bathed his clammy brow, and forced some fiery spirit between his white lips; but, at a glance, Roy knew that death-like pallor on his face could mean only one thing.

Francis opened his eyes and met Roy's anguished gaze.

"Don't you worry about me," he whispered, in a weak voice. "I'm done for! Thank God it was not you, Roy!"

"I would give the world if it had been!" was Roy's hoarse reply. "Old chap, I can't save you. You're bleeding internally. I've seen men go off like this before."

"Don't worry," came the faint reply, "it is better so. I was not fit for her. Roy—you will be good to her—and take her away from this place. It was—all my fault. I brought her here—but you will forgive me—for you will have her. I never guessed you cared—till to-night. Let me see her to say—good-bye—and then—"

"You're all wrong, man!" cried Roy, his deep voice husky with emotion. "As you love her, don't breathe such a thing to her. I am nothing to her—nothing! This will break her heart!"

He rose, too overcome to speak further, and in another moment he had raised Gowan unresistingly and led her to her lover's side.

"He's dying, Gowan, and I cannot save him," he said in tones that quivered to her heart like sharp arrows.

The dying man stretched out his arms. "Mein liebschen," (little love) he murmured. And at the endearment Roy turned and stole into the house-plate.

"I am going out beyond—Gowan—and I'd like you to promise—that—that—you'll give up the music-halls—and some day—I'd like you to go to England and see my sister Alix—and Ian Cameron—and you'll tell him I never forgot I owed everything—to him—and—Roy."

He looked at her wistfully, but Gowan's face was as chiselled marble.

She dropped to her knees. She was pas-

sive, with a wild calmness that was worse than tears.

"It's been a wasted life—Gowan. I've failed miserably—but the great Christ—is merciful—and—you—have blessed it at the last. You'll tell Alix I died happy—because of you. Kiss me good-bye—just once, liebschen—it's not good-bye, after all—but only—aufwiederschen" (till we meet again)—"you'll believe that now—for my sake, Gowan."

"How can I believe?" she passionately answered his appeal. "There is no one left to love me! There is nothing left to live for!"

Her pent up anguish gave way, and she burst into a flood of tears.

He strove to rise and draw her nearer. "There—is—Roy," he whispered. Then a gush of blood came, and he fell back.

He had gone out to the great beyond.

It was upon Roy that fell all the stern responsibilities of those long, wretched days that followed—the reporting to the authorities of Dawson City of that morning's tale of horror, and the burial of its victims.

He had to prove, too, Gowan's ownership of the claims, as her father's sole heir, and also register the transfer of Francis's share to his sister, Alix, as next of kin. The latter was the one point about which Gowan showed any special interest. For the rest, she left everything to Roy, with a listless dejection altogether alien to her nature, and which at times overwhelmed Roy with its meek reliance.

Uncle Mac's will, dated two years back, contained no appointment of trustee, or provision for the recompense of such; but Roy desired no recompense, and perhaps because Gowan had been left so unconditionally her own mistress, he accepted all the more proudly the trust she reposed in him.

It was when it was all over, and there remained nothing further to be done but the disposal of his future and hers, he realized how bitter for him would be that parting which must come at last.

By mutual consent they had come to speak of her immediate return to San Francisco as a matter of course, despite the hazardous undertaking of a Winter journey across the overland route.

Roy had at first urged its postponement to the Spring, when with the opening of the ice-bound river, the passage by the Yukon to St. Michaels could be made with comparative ease; but Gowan for once had asserted her will.

With the count's death her connection with the Dawson City Variety Entertainment Company had come to a tragic conclusion, and not all the wealth in Alaska could have induced her to renew it.

As for Roy, at Francis Rugen's grave ended his self-imposed task of heroic friendship; and now Gowan's departure severed the last link that bound him to the far Northwest.

With the aid of small capital, he saw fortune—even fabulous riches—within his reach to win; but he did not possess the capital. His toil had been the toil of the laborer, sweetened only by the knowledge that it was the labor of love.

With the thought of Gowan gone, his bankrupt heart turned from the golden desert with a sudden, tender yearning to the grey old city of his birth—the dreams of his boyhood, the great ambitions of his profession. The old life might be his once more. New hopes might come to him there. Ay, even in time he might forget.

"Why should I stay?" Gowan had passionately met his demur. "All the terrors of the past cannot be less endurable than this inaction, with nothing but the memory of those two lying out there under the cruel snow, dead—dead for ever!"

Roy was pacing the room with uneven,

halting steps. He stopped and stood over her, speaking a little hoarsely:

"Don't, Gowan! Don't say these things! I cannot bear it! It is wrong to listen to you. It is wrong to yourself, it is wrong to God! If you steel your heart against all faith in the Hereafter, you put from you every hope of happiness that is left to you."

He was laboring under strong self-control to hide the emotion of a stern Northern nature shrinks to betray, and Gowan little guessed from what an anguished soul that abrupt, almost brusque sentence came.

She recovered herself by a mighty effort, and turned from him with a sort of chilled pride.

"You are right!" she said, in a passionate voice. All that love me have gone from me. Even Claus was taken." Words failed her. She rushed from the room.

And Roy, he hurried out of the house, feeling he could not endure more.

CHAPTER X.

Often in after days Roy looked back on that wonderful journey southward with amazement at his own foolhardy confidence to attempt it, and Gowan's courageous endurance through untold hardships.

The long-suffering Wenonah, and three trustworthy miners who had satisfied their thirst for gold, and eagerly braved the dangers of the pass to hasten homeward with their hard-earned spoil, made up the party supplemented by the Indian carriers.

The most of the Summer's output from the Henderson mines had already been sent down by the last steamer leaving the Yukon that year.

Lulu and his little gang of diggers had again been left in charge, to follow the Winter operations of having and delving the ground, to reach the bedrock in readiness for the pick and sluice-box in the Spring; but there had been no definite plans made as to the ultimate working and management of the mine, for Roy had refrained from harassing Gowan on the subject until she had consulted her uncle in San Francisco.

Three months had worn away when the long, never-to-be-forgotten sled-journey neared its end at last with their arrival at Dena; and, once there, on board the swift steam launch to Juneau, the perils they had come through seemed indeed of the far past.

Out of the winding-sheet of the great white mountains a fresh, young world was breaking, and on all the barren trees of the valley Spring had kissed back the immortal blossoms of hope.

Yet Gowan's grief-laden heart was slow to take comfort. It seemed to her, as they drew nearer and nearer to their goal, no future could be so fair to her as the past she had left behind forever.

A subdued sadness had fallen upon her, crushing out every remnant of the scornful levity Roy had once so sternly condemned. Sometimes he even found himself longing for a little word of her old playful abuse, in preference to the apathetic indifference to his presence which his conscious love imagined all too apparent.

It was on a fair day in February when their steamer reached San Francisco, and there a wonderful surprise awaited them, which charmed back the first smile to Gowan's lips.

In answer to a letter breaking the news of Francis's death, and his own return, which Roy had been able to send out from Dawson City by a Government officer, Ian Cameron was waiting to welcome the travellers.

Ercolton was the first familiar face Roy's eyes were to fall on, although Ian, on his part, experienced a momentary difficulty in recognizing the once well-groomed and clean-shaven Roy in the bronzed miner who grasped his hand.

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But not all the privations of the wild
pass had robbed Roy's blue eyes of their
frank gaze, or his boyish voice of its ring-
ing cadence.

True there was sadness in the meeting.
They spoke of the dead with the lingering
regret both performers felt all too keenly.
And then Alix stepped timidly forward,
and whispering "Kiss me, for Francis's
sake," put her arms about Gowan's neck,
with a little sobbing cry. Roy felt anew all
the bitterness of death which had come up
on them in the far Klondyke, when he had
looked his last upon that snow-bound
grave.

"You trusted him to me, and I would
have saved him if I could. You will believe
that?" he said huskily. For Alix had turned
and laid her two hands on his, with a true
sympathy that touched him deeply.

"It was hard at first, but now I know
that God does everything for the best,"
was her brave answer.

Gowan heard it in dull despair. Alas!
such comfort awoke no responsive chord
in her stricken, unhappy soul. Her unhap-
piness was intensely real, despite the proud
effort she maintained to hide her despair.

But in the tender companionship of that
other woman, who, too, had passed
"through the crucible" of pain, and come
out pure gold, the sharp edge of her grief
gradually wore off.

Something in the influence of Alix's
guileless faith stole into Gowan's empty
heart. It broke down the grim barriers of
unbelief, that years of thoughtless frivo-
lity had built up, and brought with it the
great possibility of that "higher hope of
what shall be at last."

But there was another secret sorrow
gnawing at Gowan's heart, of which Alix
knew nothing.

With their arrival in San Francisco, Roy
had practically handed over the manage-
ment of Gowan's affairs to her uncle, for
Roy's ultimate return to Edinburgh had
somehow come to be an understood thing
between them from the first; and now, as
the expiration of Evelyn's leave drew
near, Gowan was bracing herself for an-
other parting she had learned to dread.

Alix had been tenderly solicitous in per-
suading the girl to accompany them home,
and make the acquaintance of barrack-town
life in the old world; but nothing would
prevail upon Gowan to give her consent.

Roy, alas! was all unconscious that the
greatest reason for her refusal was that
he himself had never urged upon her to do so.

It was within a week of that farewell
when Roy sought her out one morning in
her uncle's library, with an open telegram
in his hand.

He was once more the well-groomed,
clean-shaven Roy of old; and as Gowan
looked up at his approach, her heart
bounded for all her glance was so calm.

Roy betrayed so slight excitement.

"I've just had an important message
for you." He took a chair and drew it near
hers, spreading out the telegram on the
table before them.

It was from the agent of a wealthy syndi-
cate, then buying up a large tract of land
in the Klondyke. Several rich veins had
just been purchased not far from the Hen-
derson claims, and the syndicate were wil-
ling to give a handsome sum to include the
latter mines in their operations.

The communication had been made to
him, Roy explained, owing to his having
managed affairs before leaving Dawson.

"What does uncle say?" Gowan asked.
She was almost listless in comparison with
Roy.

Roy rejoined that that gentleman had
not yet been consulted, being still absent at
his office in the city.

"What do you say?" queried Gowan
then. A little flush had risen on her oval
cheek.

"I say take it, if the experts who go over

the claims keep up to this figure. You
might never get such an offer again. It
would save you no end of worry, and—well,
it would bring your fortune to half a mil-
lion."

He rose abruptly.

"And you," she said, a little tremulous-
ly, "who have had most of the worry so
far, you must let me—" She paused.

He picked up the telegram with an air
of irritation.

"Thanks, I understand perfectly. I'm
sorry you hate being in my debt so much,"
he continued, with an attempt at raille-
ry, "for I don't see how it can be helped, un-
less, say, you send me back as your man-
ager."

"Send you back?" Her voice broke.

She stood looking at him, her bosom
heaving, the great pupils of her eyes grow-
ing blacker and wilder with entreaty.

Roy felt his brain reeling.

"Gowan!" he cried.

And suddenly, as if a strong barrier had
been swept down by a mighty rushing tor-
rent, he put out his hands and drew her
to him with a passion too deep for words.

"Not my manager," she whispered then,
"but my master."

.....

It was a long moment that Roy held her
in that close embrace as if he could never
let her go, and when he released her a lit-
tle, it was to say, with tender upbraiding:

"Little woman, do you know that once
you said you hated me?"

She hid her face on his shoulder in pret-
ty penitence.

"I believe I loved you from the first—
straight away," she confessed. "It was be-
cause you cared for Francis I longed to
help you with him; and then—and then I
came to care for him a little—because he
was the only one who loved me."

Roy stooped then, and sealed her lips
with his first kiss.

"No, I'll not let you say he was the only
one, for Gowan, I, too, loved you straight
away," he said, copying her words with a
betrayal of proud proprietorship.

"How could I guess?" she pouted. "You
never did anything but find fault with me
—you know you didn't!"

She threw back her head and looked up
in his face.

"My darling, it was all because I feared
for you so," he answered, in tones that vi-
brated with their deep feeling.

Her eyes dropped, mastered by his emo-
tion.

"I will be good, for you are right, Roy.
I am learning that at last. And now I
shall have you to help me." She paused,
then impulsively lifted her eyes, to repeat,
with all the witching manner of old:

"I go, as from Siberian plains,
To gardens of Cathay."



NOTES.

The stomach has four coats.

The tympanum is really a drum.

The human skull contains 30 bones.

The moon moves 3,333 feet per second.

The sense of touch is duldest on the back.

Every hair has two oil glands at its base.

Europe is less than one-fourth the size of Asia.

The globe of the eye is moved by six muscles.

SWAM SAN FRANCISCO BAY.

Assistant Chief Wharfinger Harry Scott
of San Francisco, Cal., is the owner of a
jewel setting, Count by name, with the
homing instinct developed to an extent
that would do credit to a blue Antwerp
or any other kind of carrier pigeon.

Scott, who lives on the "Frisco side of
the bay, has acquired a habit of visiting
a certain house in Berkeley, and is usually
accompanied by Count. He made his regu-
lar call one Friday evening, but on going
away decided to leave Count with his
friends until his next visit. Count was
consigned to the cellar, and, with the set-
ter's howls ringing in his ears, Scott bade
his friends good-by and returned to the
city.

In some way Count made his escape
from the cellar in the night, and when
Scott reached his office Saturday he found
a telegram from Berkeley telling him that
his dog was lost. Saturday is a busy day
on the water front, and Scott had not time
at once to do anything toward the recovery
of his dog, but at 11 o'clock Count saved
him the trouble by crawling into the office,
wet, covered with mud, tired out and look-
ing very much ashamed of himself.

Count walked into the office, feeling
probably that he deserved and would prob-
ably receive punishment for his escapade;
but when Scott greeted him with a "Dear
old dog" he feebly wagged his tail and
dropped asleep right in the middle of the
floor.

Count was aroused from his slumber and
received a bath, but immediately afterward
resumed his sleep; and, beyond wagging
his tail in a half-hearted manner, refused
to move for the rest of the day.

The dog had evidently traveled a long
and weary way, and judging from the ap-
pearance of his coat when he arrived, and
his worn-out condition, there is every rea-
son to believe that he not only worked his
way across some miles of mud flats, but
afterward swam across the bay.

MAKE THE MEN MARKET.

There are few things that exhaust a
woman more than a day shopping. The
average man looks upon a woman's "pur-
chasing day" as one of pleasure, but when
he accompanies her on one of these shop-
ping expeditions he goes home, after his
patience has been exhausted, with a differ-
ent belief. He learns, too, that a woman
can endure vexations and disappointments
with much more equanimity than he can,
and he mentally vows never to do it again.

The number of miles traversed is really
what tires one, and it is a little wonder that
the woman who does the shopping for her-
self and her entire family, as well as the
marketing and the bargaining with the
"butcher and baker and candlestick maker,"
should feel the need of rest for her
tired nerves.

No mother who has the care of little
children should give the precious morning
hours to anything else but to the nursery;
nor should she let butchers and grocers
boys call for and deliver orders, because
there is sure to be dissatisfaction if she
does. Some wealthy families allow their
chef to take charge of the household, and
he collects a large percentage from the
tradesmen, which, of course, is added to
the monthly bill. Reputable storekeeper
will not do this kind of business, however,
and the chef "patronage" is controlled en-
tirely by a few men. On the whole, it is
much more satisfactory for the man of the
house to do the marketing. He will get the
best meat, have his order promptly at-
tended to and save about twenty-five per
cent. in the transaction, as well as the
health of his wife.